

The Prophecy of Isaiah
Spread the Good News

Four passages in the Prophecy of Isaiah are called the “Servant Songs.”
[42:1-7; 49:1-13; 50:4-11; 52:13 - 53:12]

The previous lesson examined the first, and this lesson takes up the second and the third of the “Servant Songs.”

The term “servant” is used frequently by Isaiah, usually in reference to Israel. The greater emphasis, however, is placed on the Servant: Messiah.

The Servant as a Light to the Gentiles

Isaiah 49:1-13

The Servant {Messiah} first addresses coastlands {islands} and people from afar {distant lands}. [1]

God had summoned Him into service before His earthly birth, and fashioned His mouth into a sharp sword and made like a polished arrow. [1-2] These images of weapons declare that His ministry would be powerful and sure.

The Lord takes the name “Israel” [3]. This is not the nation of Israel because verse 5 describes the same Servant as having a mission to Israel. The Servant is the True Israel and is the fulfillment of what national Israel should have been, i.e. “A light unto the Gentiles.”

The Servant expresses disappointment and yet faith. [4] The Christ will encounter strong opposition and apparent failure. From the viewpoint of an observer the cross of Jesus seemed to be a defeat and not a victory.

The Messiah is not for the Jews only but a “light for the nations [Gentiles]. [6]

When Mary came to the temple for her purification an old man named Simeon prophesied about the Child and quotes this passage in Isaiah.

Luke 2:22-35

²² And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”) ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.” ²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.

²⁶ And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. ²⁷ And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, ²⁸ he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

²⁹ "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,
according to your word;

³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation

³¹ that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and for glory to your people Israel."

³³ And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. ³⁴ And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed ³⁵ (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

The One who will be despised in His first coming will be worshipped by all at His second coming. [7]

The immediate fulfillment of [8] was in the return of the Jews from captivity in Babylon to Jerusalem under Cyrus.

Its further fulfillment is an eschatological question; either a millennial reign of Christ on earth or at the end of this present age into eternity. [9-13]

The Lord Remembers Zion

Isaiah 49:14-26

A mother would sooner forget her nursing child than for God to forget His people. The separation from God that our sins impose on us demands a sufficient Sacrifice.

Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, is the only acceptable sacrifice for sin.

The Differences between the Servant and Israel

Isaiah 50:1-11

Before the next Servant Song, God reminded the people that it was they who had broken off their relationship with Him; it was they who chose to leave Him. [1-3]

The third Servant Song describes how Messiah's commitment is a far cry from would-be servants. The Lord has given words to comfort and encourage the weary, and the Servant is eager to obey, even to the death. [4-7]

The death of the Servant will not be in vain.

Philippians 2:1-11

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, ² complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³ Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Knowing full well that rejection and humiliation awaited Him, He remained confident that God the Father would vindicate Him. [8]

His accusers will wear out like a moth-eaten garment. [9]

What is the final outcome? There is good news for those who repent and turn away from sin and trust in the Lord. But those who will not repent will walk in darkness in flames and torment. [10-11]

Comfort for Zion

Isaiah 51:1-16

The Lord reminded the Jews in exile of His faithfulness and uses the metaphor of rocks being drawn from the same quarry. They all descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God had called Abraham while he was an idolater living in Ur of the Chaldees. Out of one man came many descendants. So God will call the exiles out of Babylon and they will be multiplied. [1-2]

There is great comfort in the promise; the Babylonians had left Judah a desolate place but God will restore it as the Garden of Eden. [3-8]

Isaiah enthusiastically calls upon God to rise to action and demonstrate His power. [9-11]

God's response is do not be afraid of mortal man.

Who are we? We are either God's children with His power or we are nothing more than pathetic and foolish mortals. [12-16]

The Removal of God's Anger

Isaiah 51:17-23

The twice repeated call to "awake" [9 & 17] is first to plead with God for action and then in anticipation of deliverance.

Conquered Jerusalem is represented as a drunken woman who is staggering about, unaided by her sons. None of her sons will help her because they too had drunk of the Lord's judgment and are as helpless as an antelope in a net.

But God offers encouragement and makes a promise. The day will come when God's people will never again drink from His judgment.

The Lord's Redemption of Israel

Isaiah 52:1-12

Once more God's wake up call is to Zion / Jerusalem.

They are to rise up and clothe themselves with strength, for the day will come when the oppressors will not bother them again.

So the exiles were to cease their mourning over their captivity, as tragic as it was, for it will end. [1-3]

Isaiah briefly reviews the history of Israel's past oppressions. The Hebrews were slaves in Egypt and had recently been invaded by the Assyrians. [4]

In both cases God had delivered His people. This is proof that no oppressor had any legitimate claim on them. God will deliver His faithful remnant from the Babylonian oppressors who had mocked and slandered His name. [5-6]

The context from which Isaiah relates his prophecy is another favorite passage. The "beautiful feet" {timely} of those who bring the message of the Gospel.

Romans 10:14-15

¹⁴ But how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"

Isaiah sees a messenger bringing the news, not of battle, but of the return of the exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem. This momentous event will confirm the Lord's control over the nations, even Babylon. [7-12]

In ancient times watchmen on city walls would look for incoming messengers. Here the watchmen of Jerusalem are pictured awaiting the arrival of messengers and then shouting for joy as they realize that God's people are about to return to the city. [8]

One can almost hear Isaiah calling joyfully across time to the exiles, exhorting them to depart from Babylon and make the long journey back to Judah. The "unclean thing" probably refers to pagan religious objects in Babylon. [11]

Those who carried the "vessels of the Lord" were probably the priests and Levites that had been captured by Nebuchadnezzar.

Ezra 1:5-11

⁵ Then rose up the heads of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up to rebuild the house of the LORD that is in Jerusalem. ⁶ And all who were about them aided them with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, with beasts, and with costly wares, besides all that was freely offered. ⁷ Cyrus the king also brought out the vessels of the house of the LORD that Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and placed in the house of his gods. ⁸ Cyrus king of Persia brought these out in charge of Mithredath the treasurer, who counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah. ⁹ And this was the number of them: 30 basins of gold, 1,000 basins of silver, 29 censers, ¹⁰ 30 bowls of gold, 410 bowls of silver, and 1,000 other vessels; ¹¹ all the vessels of gold and of silver were 5,400. All these did Sheshbazzar bring up, when the exiles were brought up from Babylonia to Jerusalem.

None of them would be leaving Babylon in haste {for fear of pursuit and recapture}, for the Lord would be with them. [12]

God will be their "rear guard" {rereward KJV} protecting them all of the way.

As a point of reference, Isaiah's ministry was from 740 to 680 B.C.; the exile in Babylon lasted from 586 to 536 B.C. Thus Isaiah's prophecy of the return from exile was fulfilled nearly 150 years later.